

American Cultural interpretations inside Children's Fairy Tale

“The Wonderful Wizard of Oz”

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ABSTRACT

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is one of the most popular fairy tales in American children's literature. It not only pleases children but also interprets American culture. The story is about the adventure of a girl named Dorothy in the Land of Oz. The author, Baum, had indicated the American economic fight between silver and gold standard in this novel. Oz is the abbreviation of ounces, which is the weighting unit of these precious metals. Since, American government had adopted gold standard after this economic crisis, it means that the Populist Party supported by Baum had lost the election of American President at last. The pair of silver shoes, Dorothy worn, had disappeared forever, represented that silver standard had never been adopted by American government. Therefore, we can understand American culture by the study of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

Key Words : The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, gold standard, silver standard, American culture, American President

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is written by Lyman Frank Baum. It was originally published by the George M. Hill Company in Chicago on May 17, 1900. It is one of the most popular fairy tales in American children's literature. This book has been reprinted countless times¹.

In 1902, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was adapted to the Broadway musical stage play. This musical was the first to use the shortened title *The Wizard of Oz* opened in Chicago in 1902, then ran on Broadway for 293 stage nights from January to October 1903. It returned to Broadway in 1904, where it played from March to May and again from November to December. It successfully toured the United States with much of the same cast, as was done in those days, until 1911, and then became available for amateur use. Its initial success led Baum to keep writing thirteen more about Oz books. In 1939, the book has been highly acclaimed to the film version, Judy Garland. A classic of popular culture showed at least annually on American television from 1956 to 1974².

The story is about the adventure of a girl named Dorothy in the Land of Oz. It has been widely translated into over forty different languages. Besides its fantastic contents, we can study *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* to understand American culture in the early 20th century.

In some cases, the story proves so popular in other countries that it was adapted to suit the local culture. For instance, in some countries, these characters of the literature have been adapted another names; the tile of this book has been changed; and even in some countries, some writers have rewritten the story to suit their local culture³.

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1. Culver, Stuart. "What Manikins Want: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors", *Representations*,21(1988), pp 90-120.
 2. Sherman, Fraser A. (2005). *The Wizard of Oz Catalog: L. Frank Baum's novel, its sequels and their adaptations for stage, television, movies, radio, music videos, comic books, commercials and more*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.,p p38-56.
 3. Swartz, Mark Evan. *Oz Before the Rainbow: L. Frank Baum's "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" on Stage and Screen to 1939*(2000), pp113-139.

II. THE PLOT SUMMARY OF THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

Dorothy is an orphaned 12-year old girl who lives in a farmhouse in Kansas in the year 1900 with her Uncle Henry, Aunt Em, and little dog ToTo. One day the farmhouse, with Dorothy inside, is caught up in a twister, she finds herself lost in a strange, magical and



technical world. There she meets the miniscule and deposited in a field in the land of the Munchkins in the Land of Oz. The falling house kills the Wicked Witch of the East, who had established a region of terror over Munchkins⁴.

The Good Witch of the North comes with the Munchkins to greet Dorothy, and gives Dorothy the Silver Shoes that the Wicked Witch of the East had been wearing when she was killed. In order to return to Kansas, the Good Witch of the North tells Dorothy that the only way get home is to go to the Emerald City or City of Emeralds, where she must ask the Great Wizard of Oz to help her. The Good Witch of the North also kisses Dorothy on her forehead, stating that no one will hurt a person who has been kissed by her⁵.

On her way down the road paved with yellow brick, Dorothy and her faithful

little dog Toto meet many strange and frightening creatures. Dorothy frees the Scarecrow from the pole, is hanging on, restores the movements of the rusted Tin Woodman with an oil can, and encourages them and the Cowardly Lion to join their journey with her and Toto to the Emerald City. The Scarecrow wants to get a brain, the Tin Woodman needs a heart, and the Cowardly Lion desperately wants courage. All are convinced by Dorothy that the Wizard can help them too. They overcome obstacles on the way including narrow pieces of the yellow brick road, a pair of ravenous Kalidahs (Giant Creatures with the heads of tigers and the bodies of bears), a river, and escape from a field of sleep-inducing the deadly poppies together⁶.

4. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 3-26.

5. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 30-63.

6. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 67-85.

When the travelers arrive at the Emerald City, the Guardian of the Gates provides the companions with special green spectacles that they must wear to keep the brilliance of the Emerald City from blinding them; while wearing them, they find out everything appears in different shades of green. To Dorothy, the Wizard is a giant head; the Scarecrow sees a beautiful woman; to the Tin Woodman, he sees a ravenous beast; the Cowardly Lion sees a ball of fire. The Wizard agrees to help all of them, but one of them must kill the Wicked Witch of the West who rules over the Winkie Country⁷.

As the friends travel across the Winkie Country, the Wicked Witch sends wolves, crows, bees, and then her Winkie soldiers to attack them but they manage to get past them all. Then,



using the power of the Golden Cap, the Witch summons the Winged Monkeys to capture all of the travelers⁸.

When the Wicked Witch gains one of Dorothy's silver shoes by trickery, Dorothy in anger grabs a bucket of water and throws it on the Wicked Witch, who begins to melt. The Winkies rejoice at being freed of the witch's tyranny, and they help to reassemble the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. The Winkies love the Tin Woodman and they ask him to become their ruler, which he agrees to do after helping Dorothy return to Kansas⁹.

Dorothy uses the Golden Cap to summon the Winged Monkeys to carry her and her companions back to the Emerald City, and the King tells how they were bound by an enchantment to the cap by Gayelette¹⁰.

7. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 88-102.

8. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 110-131.

9. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 136-159.

10. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 163-191.

When Dorothy and her friends meet the Wizard of Oz again, he tries to put them off. Toto accidentally tips over a screen in a corner of the throne room, revealing an old man who had journeyed to Oz from Omaha long ago in a hot air balloon¹¹. The Wizard provides the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion with a head full of brain, pins, and needles ("a lot of bran-new brains"), a silk heart stuffed with sawdust, and a potion of "courage", respectively. Because of their faith in the Wizard's power, otherwise these useless items provide a focus for their desires. In order to help Dorothy and Toto get home, the Wizard realizes that he would have to take them home with him in a new balloon, which he and Dorothy fashion from green silk. Revealing himself to the people of the Emerald City one last time, the Wizard appoints the Scarecrow, by virtue of his brains, to rule in his stead. Dorothy chases Toto after he runs after a kitten in the crowd, and before she can make it back to the balloon, the ropes break, leaving the Wizard to rise and float away alone¹².

Dorothy turns to the Winged Monkeys to carry her and Toto home, but they cannot cross the desert surrounding Oz. The Soldier with the Green Whiskers advises that Glinda, the Good Witch of the South (changed to the "North" in the 1939 film), may be able to send Dorothy and Toto home. They including the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion



journey to Glinda's palace in the Quadling Country. Together they escape the Fighting Trees, dodge the Hammer-Heads, and tread through carefully the China Country. The Cowardly Lion kills a giant spider, who is terrorizing the animals in a forest, and he agrees to return there to rule them after Dorothy returns to Kansas—the biggest of the tigers ruling in his stead as before. Dorothy uses her third wish to fly over the Hammer-Heads' mountain¹³.

At Glinda's palace, the travelers are greeted warmly, and it is revealed by Glinda that Dorothy has the power to go home all along. The Silver Shoes she wears can take her anywhere she wishes to go. She tearfully embraces her friends, all of whom will be returned, through Glinda's use of the Golden Cap, to their respective sovereignties: the Scarecrow to the Emerald City, the Tin Woodman to the Winkie

11. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 195-220.

12. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 233-263.

13. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 281-300.

Country, and the Cowardly Lion to the forest. Then she will give the Cap to the king of the Winged Monkeys, so they will never be under its spell again. Dorothy and Toto return to Kansas and have a joyful family reunion. The Silver Shoes are lost during Dorothy's flight and never seen again¹⁴.

III. THE AUTHOR OF THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF Oz

Lyman Frank Baum was born in Chittenango, New York in 1856. He was an author. He had created *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is one of the most popular books in American children's literature. Baum's father was a wealthy businessman, originally a barrel maker, who had made his fortune in the oil fields of Pennsylvania. Baum grew up on his parents' expansive estate, Rose Lawn, which he always remembered fondly as a sort of paradise¹⁵.

As a young child, he was tutored at home with his siblings, but at the age of 12 he was sent to study at Peekskill Military Academy. But after two utterly miserable years at the military academy, he was allowed to return home. Baum started writing at an early age, perhaps due to an early fascination with printing. His father bought him a cheap printing press, and he used it to produce *The Rose Lawn Home Journal* with the help of his younger brother, Henry (Harry) Clay Baum, with whom he had always been close¹⁶.

In 1880, his father built him a theatre in Richburg, New York, and Baum set about writing



plays and gathering a company to act in them. In 1880, he established a monthly trade journal, *The Poultry Record*. On November 9, 1882, Baum married Maud Gage, a daughter of Matilda Joslyn Gage, a famous women's suffrage and radical feminist activist. In 1886, when Baum was 30 years old, his first book was published: *The Book of the Hamburgs: A Brief Treatise upon the Mating, Rearing, and Management of the Different Varieties of Hamburgs*. In July 1888, Baum and his

14. L. Frank Baum. (2000). *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 0688069444, pp 301-314.

15. 15. Baum, Frank Joslyn ; MacFall, Russell P. (1961). *To please a child*, Chicago: Reilly & Lee Co, pp 55-58.

16. 16. Rogers, Katharine M. L. *Frank Baum: Creator of Oz*. New York, St. Martin's Press, (2000), pp 27-41.

wife moved to Aberdeen, Dakota Territory, where he opened a store, "Baum's Bazaar". Baum's description of Kansas in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is based on his experiences in drought-ridden South Dakota¹⁷.

In 1899 Baum partnered with illustrator W. W. Denslow, to publish *Father Goose, His Book*, a collection of nonsense poetry. The book was a success, becoming the best-selling children's book of the year. In 1900, Baum and Denslow (with whom he shared the copyright) published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* to much critical acclaim and financial success. The book was the best-selling children's book for two years after its initial publication. Baum went on to write thirteen more novels based on the places and people of the Land of Oz¹⁸.

IV. AMERICAN CULTURAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF Oz

Many characters and story lines represent identifiable people. Dorothy symbolized American culture, including Honesty, Justice, and Courage. The consensus is that the books were written mainly for the pleasure of Baum's younger readers, to give them a sense of possibility and imagination. Dorothy also represents as Mary Elizabeth Lease, a famous speaker of Populist Party. Her nickname is "Kansas Tornado"¹⁹. Her faithful little dog Toto was thought to be short for teetotaler, another word for Prohibition Party. The members of this party supported silver standard, too.

The Tin Woodman represents as the factory workers of the industrialized North. They worked hard for little money. At last, they had lost their human hearts and become mechanized themselves. The Cowardly Lion represents as Wall Street investors. The Wicked Witches of



the East and the West represents as the local banks and the railroad industry. The Munchkins represents as the common people. The scarecrow represents as the farmers of the Populist Party, who managed to get out of

17. Baum, Frank Joslyn ; MacFall, Russell P. (1961). *To please a child*, Chicago: Reilly & Lee Co, pp 71-75.

18. Rogers, Katharine M. L. *Frank Baum: Creator of Oz*. New York, St., Martin's Press (2000), pp 56-61.

19. Dighe, Ranjit S. (ed.) *The Historian's Wizard of Oz : Reading L. Frank Baum's Classic as a Political and Monetary Allegory* (2002), pp 90-96.

debt by making more silver coinage²⁰. The Emerald City represents Washington. The Wizard would represent as the President. The Yellow Brick Road represented as the gold standard. The silver shoes represent the sixteen to one silver ratio. The kiss from the Good Witch of the North is the electoral mandate. Although Baum said that the name "OZ" came from his file cabinet labeled O-Z. Many critics believe that "Oz" is the abbreviation for the measuring of these precious metals : Ounces²¹. And the consensus is that the books were written mainly for the pleasure of Baum's younger readers, to give them a sense of possibility and imagination.

In 1860~1910, The US was suffering from drought. The exchange rate of gold and silver was twenty to one silver ratio. It represents silver devaluation was too much. It means workers in the seven states of the West depended on silver to live, working hard for little money. So they had not enough money to purchase silver devaluation²².

In the nineteenth century, farmers in the West would against the gold standard. They had supported silver standard. Every one could bring silver to bank. They could use silver to buy everything. They had assembled "The Populist Party". In 1896, William Jennings Bryan, the fiery popular candidate from the Populist Party, was a teetotaler himself. Bryan also supported for free silver after economic conditions improved in the late 1890s. Baum had supported the party positively. But William Bryan had failed in the 25th President Election. The Populist Party had lost its existence importance. So Baum had come home to write dramas and plays again²³.

20. Littlefield, Henry. "The Wizard of Oz : Parable on Populism." *American Quarterly*, V. 16, 3, Spring, 1964, pp 47-58.

21. Parker, David B. (1994), "The rise and fall of the Wonderful Wizard of Oz as a Parable on Populism". *Journal of the Georgia Association of Historians*, 16(1994), pp 49-63.



22. Ritter, Gretchen. "Silver slippers and a golden cap : L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and historical memory in American politics." *Journal of American Studies* (August 1997) Vol. 31, no. 2, pp 171-203.
23. Rockoff, Hugh. "The Wizard of Oz as a Monetary Allegory", *Fairy Tale Political Economy* 98 (1990), pp 102-116.

In 1873, American government followed The United Kingdom, France, and German to seek gold coinage. The economic fight happened between silver and gold standard. Bryan failed in the President Election in 1896. Mckinley supported gold coinage, had voted as the 25th American President. Since then the United States of America has established the gold standard²⁴.

V. CONCLUSION

Baum conceals the process of the economic policy between silver and gold standard to hide the characters of *the Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. How did they come home after the adventures of these travelers? The method is that you just had knocked for three times with the heels of the pair of silver shoes because of their fantastic magic power. The pair of silver shoes would take you to everywhere you want to go²⁵.

Dorothy holds her faithful dog ToTo to say goodbye to everyone. Then she knocks the silver shoes for three times with the heels. Dorothy had been raised into the sky by wind. Finally, she had fallen down on the lawn in front of Uncle Henry's house. There was a pair of socks on Dorothy's feet. But the pair of silver shoes had disappeared. Maybe they had been lost in the sky or in the dessert. No one could find them again. These shoes had disappeared for ever²⁶.

Baum originally supported Bryan, the candidate from the Populist Party, who established the silver standard after he was elected to be the 25th American President. They had believed the silver coinage would solve American economic crises. The pair of silver shoes had represents silver standard. The fantastic adventures of Dorothy represent the twenty-fifth American President Election and Bryan had failed in this election. The pair of silver shoes represents as silver coinage. These shoes disappeared forever means that the silver standard would not replace the gold

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24. Thesis for Master. Tao, Wu. "L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: An American Fairy Tale", 1993, pp 48-80.
 25. Velde, Francois R. "Following the Yellow Brick Road : How the United States Adopted the Gold Standard", *Economic Perspectives*. Vol. 26, Issue : 2. 2002. pp 419-421.



26. Rockoff, Hugh. "The Wizard of Oz as a Monetary Allegory", *Journal of Political Economy* 98 (1990), pp 739-760.

standard at all²⁷. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is not only a fairy tale, but also American culture interpretations. So we can study *the Wonderful Wizard of Oz* to understand American culture in the early twentieth century.

27. Jian-Cheng, Lai. "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is not Fairy Tale", *Journal of History*, Vol.261, 2009, pp 36-39.

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從<<綠野仙蹤>>看美國文化

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摘要

<<綠野仙蹤>>是美國兒童文學中，最受歡迎的作品之一。不僅孩子們喜歡閱讀，而且也可從中了解美國文化的涵義。故事敘述一位名叫桃樂絲小女孩的冒險故事，作者包姆更將二十世紀初期，美國金、銀本位之爭等議題蘊含在其中。

Oz 是黃金白銀重量單位 ounce 的縮寫，故事中的主角之一，小女孩桃樂絲所穿的銀鞋，象徵美國經過金、銀本位之爭後，最後美國政府採用金本位，這意味著包姆所支持的”民粹黨”候選人在美國總統選舉中失敗，故事的結局是桃樂絲所穿的銀鞋永遠消失了，表示美國永遠不會再採用白銀本位，從此確定了美國的金元本位主義。我們可以藉由研究<<綠野仙蹤>>的過程中，來了解美國文化所蘊含的意義。

關鍵詞：綠野仙蹤、金本位、銀本位、美國文化、美國總統

